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RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 7314  
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 6471  
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY 1686  
RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO 0650  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 2826  
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA 3505

C O N F I D E N T I A L ALGIERS 000892

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/10/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KOCI](#) [AG](#)  
SUBJECT: HOTEL SHOOT-OUT SHOCKS ALGERIAN TOWN

REF: A. ALGIERS 588  
[1](#)B. ALGIERS 661

Classified By: CDA, a.i. Thomas F. Daughton; reasons 1.4 (b, d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Incidents of communal violence flared up in several regions recently as Algerians entered their August vacation season. In a grisly display of clan justice on August 6, a mob ransacked a private hotel in Sidi Aissa (Msila province), provoking a shooting spree that raged through the night, leaving four people shot or stoned to death and 63 injured, 52 from gunshot wounds. According to press accounts of the incident, police did not respond until after the violence subsided. Meanwhile, sectarian tensions flared again in July in the desert town of Berriane, leaving 15 people injured before local notables could calm the situation. There has been an uptick in civil incidents during the months of July and August throughout Algeria, which have manifested in the form of riots, hunger strikes and tribal or blood feuds. The increased violence, and the authorities' ineffectual response to it, underscore simmering tensions in Algerian society, frustration with the government, and perhaps an attitude among some Algerians that to get justice they must take matters into their own hands.  
END SUMMARY.

BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE  
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[1](#)2. (U) After mourning the death of Arbaoui Saad, who succumbed to fatal injuries from an altercation following 15 days in the hospital, a group of relatives and concerned citizens descended upon the Djebel Naga hotel in the town of Sidi Aissa (Msila province, southeast of Algiers) on August 6 to vent their outrage at those they held responsible. Saad's relatives claimed that the hotel owner's son fatally wounded Saad when, after an argument between the two, he ran over Saad with his car. Soon after the group arrived at the hotel, the situation reportedly degenerated into a scene reminiscent of a Sopranos shoot-out.

[1](#)3. (U) The hotel manager and hotel security guards reacted first by opening fire on the crowd, who allegedly attempted a raid on the hotel premises. Eyewitnesses described to the press their horror as gunfire erupted and the mob destroyed the hotel gate and began looting and burning the property in fighting that raged through the night. When the violence subsided, police found the hotel manager's body dumped on the street, and press reports indicated that he was stoned to death. The police also discovered the bodies of three others who died from gunshot wounds. The press reported a total of 63 people injured, including eight women; 52 of the injured

suffered gunshot wounds. The rioters also looted and burned the hotel and incinerated 20 cars and three trucks that were parked near the building.

¶4. (U) The French-language daily El-Watan criticized the authorities' failure to stop the violence and to intervene in what it called a foreseeable incident. In a statement to the press, the provincial authorities said they arrested 15 people in connection with the riot.

#### TEMPERS FLARING

¶5. (U) The incident in Sidi Aissa was the most dramatic in a series of violent civilian clashes throughout Algeria during July and August, and joined a recent trend of spontaneous street violence. According to press reports, a gun battle broke out on July 31 between alleged terrorists and Algerian security services in hills outside the village of Ben Chergui, near Algeria's third-largest city, Constantine. Police sources would not, however, confirm the account. Another outburst of violence occurred in the province of Tiaret on July 27, when a group of young men from rival groups clashed, leaving one person injured.

¶6. (U) Sectarian riots erupted again in the village of Berriane (Ghardaia province) on July 22 between hooded youths from rival Arab and Berber communities. Local press reported that venerable members of the Ibadi and Maliki communities intervened in cooperation with the Gendarmerie to implore their people not to respond to the provocations of what they described as "unknown hooded young men." Despite appeals for calm, the riots resulted in 15 serious injuries and significant property damage. Large-scale sectarian clashes in Berriane in May left two people dead and 30 injured, along with what the authorities estimated to be USD 725,000 in property damage (reftel).

¶7. (C) COMMENT: Periodic civil strife as a means to release pent-up social tension is not new in Algeria and has become an increasingly common part of the socio-economic landscape. However, these and other events during last two months have been unusually violent. Prior to the incident in Sidi Aissa, open gun battles in major population centers have been unheard-of since the violence of the mid-1990s. The grisly account of clan justice and the absence of the authorities' intervention in Sidi Aissa highlight a troubling deterioration in social order, and perhaps an attitude among some Algerians that to get justice they must take matters into their own hands. Against the broader background of hunger strikes, tribal or blood feuds and riots, the incident in Sidi Aissa is a symbol of the deepening discontent in Algerian society and the government's struggle to muster an effective response.

DAUGHTON